



The Freethinker's Bible

Ancient and Modern Voices Speak Out On the
Mysteries, Challenges, and Joys of Living

AN ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Ronald W. Angel, M.D.

WHY DO WE READ QUOTATIONS?

It is a good thing for an uneducated man to read books of quotations. Bartlett's Familiar Quotations is an admirable work, and I studied it intently. The quotations when engraved upon the memory give you good thoughts. They also make you anxious to read the authors and look for more.

Winston Churchill

\$ \$ \$

The great lines and passages from the ancients make us recognize with reassurance - or resignation - how little man changes down the ages.

Emily M. Beck

\$ \$ \$

These authors, though they instructed me in no science by which men may promise to themselves to acquire the least riches or worldly power, taught me, however, the art of despising the highest acquisitions of both. They elevate the mind, and steel and harden it against the capricious invasions of fortune. They not only instruct in the knowledge of Wisdom, but confirm men in her habits, and demonstrate plainly, that this must be our guide, if we propose ever to arrive at the greatest worldly happiness, or to defend ourselves, with any tolerable security, against the misery which everywhere surrounds and invests us.

Henry Fielding

\$ \$ \$

My business is to beguile the wearisomeness of declining life, as I endeavor to do, by the delights of classical reading, and of mathematical truths, and by the consolations of a sound philosophy, equally indifferent to hope and fear.

Thomas Jefferson



ON BEING ORIGINAL

We come too late to say anything which has not been said already.

Jean de La Bruyere

\$ \$ \$

The best ideas are common property.

Seneca

We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; they are transmitted to us, trained into us. All that is original in us, and therefore fairly creditable or discreditable to us, can be covered up and hidden by the point of a cambric needle, all the rest being atoms contributed by, and inherited from, a procession of ancestors that stretches back a billion years to the Adam-clan or grasshopper or monkey from whom our race has been so tediously and ostentatiously and unprofitably developed.

Mark Twain

\$ \$ \$

... and there is no new thing under the sun.

Ecclesiastes

MORE ON BEING ORIGINAL:

PEDIGREE OF AN IDEA

Be not afraid of sudden fear.

Proverbs 3:25

Nil terribile nisi ipse timor.
Nothing is terrifying except fear.

Francis Bacon

\$ \$ \$

The thing of which I have most fear is fear.

Montaigne

The only thing I am afraid of is fear.

Duke of Wellington

\$ \$ \$

Nothing is so much to be feared as fear.

Henry David Thoreau

\$ \$ \$

We have nothing to fear but fear itself.

Franklin D. Roosevelt



A REGULAR WAREHOUSE

Whatever is well said by anyone is mine.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

There's a regular warehouse of fine suggestions, and it we're not better it isn't because there aren't plenty of marvelous and true ideas to draw on, but because our vanity weighs more than all of them put together.

Saul Bellow

\$ \$ \$

Good sense is of all things in the world the most equally distributed, for everybody thinks he is so well supplied with it, that even those most difficult to please in all other matters never desire more of it than they already possess.

Rene Descartes

VISIT TO A STRANGE LAND

Life is but a struggle and the visit to a
strange land.

Marcus Aurelius

\$ \$ \$

The theory of quantum electrodynamics describes Nature as absurd from the point of view of common sense. And it agrees fully with experiment. So, I hope you can accept Nature as She is - absurd.

Richard Feynman

\$ \$ \$

THE DEADEYE PRINCIPLE: It's a queer world.

Dick Deadeye, in H.M.S. Pinafore

\$ \$ \$

The more the universe seems comprehensible,
the more it seems pointless.

Steven Weinberg

\$ \$ \$

In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but pitiless indifference. As that unhappy poet A.E. Housman put it:

For nature, heartless, witless nature
Will neither care nor know
DNA neither cares nor knows. DNA just is. And
we dance to its music.

Richard Dawkins

\$ \$ \$

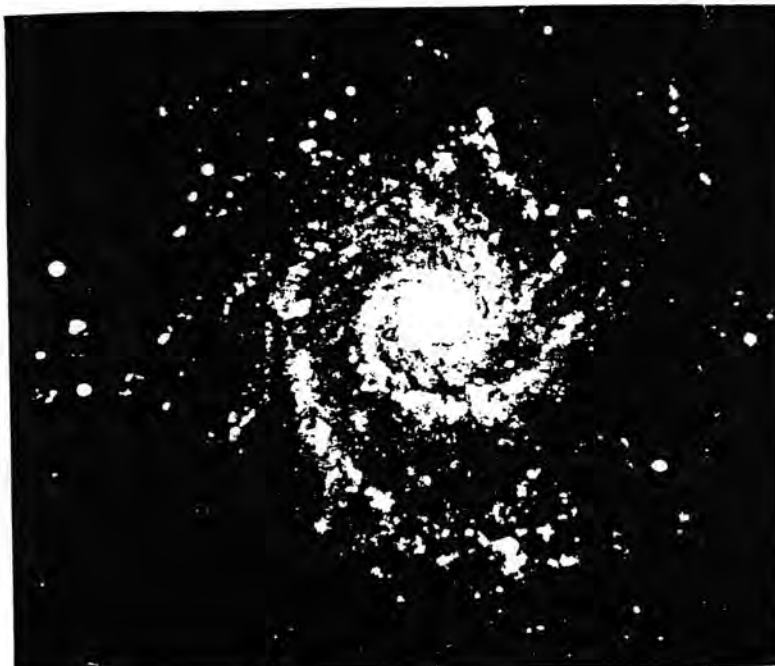
As flies to wanton boys, are we to the
gods;
They kill us for their sport.

King Lear

EMINENT SCIENTIST SUPPORTS DEADEYE PRINCIPLE

Now my suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose...I suspect that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, in any philosophy. That is the reason why I have no philosophy myself, and must be my excuse for dreaming.

J.B.S. Haldane



A LITTLE ISLAND

Here we are in this great expanding universe, which doesn't pay much attention to us and we're creating a little island of life in which there's beauty and scientific research and loving each other, and we do it all ourselves. We make it up as we go along.

It may be that there's no objective importance that registers in the cosmic equations, but importance is what we give to things.

Steven Weinberg



TWO HISTORY LESSONS

His [Antoninus'] reign is marked by the rare advantage of furnishing very few materials for history; which is indeed little more than the register of of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.

Edward Gibbon

\$ \$ \$

Anyone who studies history and still expects human beings to be rational is truly an optimist. The most encouraging thing about history is that it shows that the species can survive one blunder and disaster after another. That of course is not always true of individuals or nations.

Thomas Sowell

LIVING WITH DOUBT

I can live with doubt and uncertainty. I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong. I have approximate answers and possible beliefs and different degrees of certainty about different things, but I'm not absolutely sure of anything. There are many things I don't know anything about, such as whether it even means anything to ask why we are here. But I don't have to know an answer. I don't feel frightened by not knowing things, by being lost in a mysterious universe without any purpose, which is the way it really is, so far as I can tell. It doesn't frighten me.

Richard Feynman

\$ \$ \$

Skepticism, the tonic of minds, the tonic of life, the agent of truth - the way of art and salvation.

Joseph Conrad

\$ \$ \$

Conrad's skepticism is ultimately but a "reasonable" recognition of the fact that man is a natural creature who can rest on no revealed values and can look forward to neither individual immortality nor racial survival. But, reason, in this sense, is the denial of life and energy, for against all reason man insists, as man, on creating and trying to live by certain values. These values are, to use Conrad's words, "illusions," but the last wisdom is for man to realize that though his values are illusions, the illusion is necessary, is infinitely precious, is the mark of his human achievement, and is, in the end, his only truth.

Robert Penn Warren

SKEPTICISM? ALL RIGHT, BUT CYNICISM?

[The ancient Greeks tried out nearly every life style that you can think of. We still describe people in terms derived from Greek schools of philosophy - Skeptics, Cynics, Stoics, Epicureans, Sophists - and place names - Spartans, Sybarites, Lesbians. The original Cynics set a pattern that has been followed, in various forms, throughout the ages. Today's bohemians, beatniks, hippies, and swingers are pale imitations of the original. Ed.].

We have no difficulty in listing the habits of a Cynic: ostentatious poverty, sexual license, the lifestyle of an itinerant beggar and preacher, a conscious rejection of common social norms and restraints (e.g. by public defecation and masturbation), not to mention the responsibilities of citizenship. He boasted of being a "citizen of the world," which meant in effect enjoying universal patronage in every city he visited without giving anything in return except hot air.

We know ,too, all too well, what a Cynic was against: polite conventions, vulgar superstition, property and capital, the fixed class system, censorship, aristocratic breeding, and most intellectual pursuits (e.g. music, geometry, and astronomy, dismissed as "useless and unnecessary").

Peter Green

§ § §

AN UPDATED DEFINITION

cynical: 1 believing that people are motivated in all their actions only by selfishness: denying the sincerity of people's motives and actions; or the value of living. 2 sarcastic, sneering, etc.

Webster's New World Dictionary



RESPONDING TO THE MYSTERIES

And wonder is also linked with a love of logic and clarity, with the conviction that rigorous thinking is the right way for a human being to respond to the mysteries of life.

Martha Nussbaum

\$ \$ \$

Phi Beta Kappa...the initial letters of the Gr motto philosophia biou kybernētes, philosophy the guide of life.

Webster's New World Dictionary

\$ \$ \$

I would not think that philosophy and reason itself will be man's guide in the foreseeable future; however, they will remain the most beautiful sanctuary they have always been for the select.

Albert Einstein

\$ \$ \$

Studia mihi nostra saluti fuerent.
My studies were my salvation.

Seneca

ON THINKING

I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a king of infinite space.

Hamlet

\$ \$ \$

Die Gedanken Sind Frei

Thoughts are free!
Who can guess them?
They fly past
Like shadows of the night.
No man can know them,
No hunter can shoot them,
They stay close by,
Thoughts are free!

German folk song

\$ \$ \$

There is nothing either good or bad,
but thinking makes it so.

Hamlet

\$ \$ \$

The vast majority of mankind dislikes thinking for itself, and much prefers to be told, acceptably but authoritatively, how it should act, what is proper for it to believe.

Peter Green

\$ \$ \$

The (Limited) Power of Positive Thinking

O! who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?
Or wallow naked in December snow
By thinking on fantastic summer's heat?

Richard II



GOD VERSUS CHANCE: PHILOSOPHY TO THE RESCUE

Perhaps someone will say: "How can philosophy help me, if Fate exists? Of what avail is philosophy, if God rules the universe? Of what avail is it if chance governs everything? For not only is it impossible to change things that are determined, but it is also impossible to plan beforehand against what is undetermined; either God has forestalled my plans, and decided what I am to do, or else Fortune gives no free play to my plans." Whether the truth, Lucilius, lies in one or all of these views, we must be philosophers; whether Fate binds us down by an inexorable law, or whether God as arbiter of the universe has arranged everything, or whether Chance drives and tosses human affairs without method, philosophy ought to be our defense.

Seneca

§ § §

Either the mind of the Whole has an impulse which reaches to each individual [theism] - and if this be so, welcome that which it set in motion - or it had this impulse once, and the rest has followed in consequence [deism]. Why then are you anxious? The whole is either a god, and all is well, or it is without plan - atoms and indivisible particles [materialism] - but you need not be without plan yourself.

Marcus Aurelius

THOUGHTS OF AN EMPEROR

Today I left the troubles surrounding me, or rather, I cast them out. For they were not outside me but within me, in my assumptions.

\$ \$ \$

Do not think that, because you despaired of being a logician or a natural scientist, you therefore despair of being free, self-respecting, socially minded and obedient to the Divine.

\$ \$ \$

How much ease he gains who does not look at what his neighbor says or does or thinks, but only at what he does himself, to make it just, holy, and good.

\$ \$ \$

What is not good for the swarm is not good for the bee.

\$ \$ \$

Very little is needed to make a happy life.

\$ \$ \$

Dig down within yourself, where the source of goodness is ever ready to gush forth.

\$ \$ \$

The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing; one should not be thrown by whatever happens unexpectedly.



TWO IMPOSTORS

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster,
And treat those two impostors just the same.

Rudyard Kipling

\$ \$ \$

Aequum memento rebus in arduis servare mentum.
Remember when life's path is steep to keep an
even mind, and, likewise, in prosperity, a
spirit restrained from overweening joy.

Horace

\$ \$ \$

DEALING WITH ADVERSITY

To make the best of what is in our power and
take the rest as it occurs.

Epictetus

\$ \$ \$

But do not make your troubles heavier to bear
and burden yourself with complaining. Pain is
slight if opinion has added nothing to it. If
by contrast you start to encourage yourself
and say "It is nothing - or nothing much,
anyway - let's stick it out, and it will soon
be over;" then in thinking it slight, you
will make it slight...It is according to
opinion that we suffer. A man is as unhappy
as he has convinced himself he is.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

Meanwhile, cling tooth and nail to the
following rule: not to give in to adversity,
never to trust prosperity, and keep before
your eyes the lawlessness of fortune, as if
she would actually do whatever is in her
power to do.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

MURPHY'S LAW: If something can go wrong, it
will go wrong.

E.A. Murphy, Jr.

ORWELL ON THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

It is quite possible that man's major problems will never be solved. But it is also unthinkable! Who is there that dares to look at the world of today and say to himself, "It will always be like this: even in a million years it cannot get appreciably better"? So you get the quasi-mystical belief that for the present there is no remedy, all political action is useless but that somewhere in space and time human life will cease to be the miserable brutish thing it is now. The only easy way out is that of the religious believer, who regards this life merely as a preparation for the next. But few thinking people now believe in life after death... The real problem is how to restore the religious attitude while accepting death as final. Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness.

George Orwell, in 1944

\$ \$ \$

There's more to life than having a good time. If there ain't, then this is a piss-poor life we're having.

August Wilson



LIVING WITHOUT THE GODS

Aiming to free people from fear of the gods, [Lucretius] showed that the whole world was made of void and atoms that moved by their own laws, that the soul died with the body, and that therefore there was no reason to fear death or supernatural powers. Understanding nature, he said, was the only way to peace of mind.

Daniel Boorstin

\$ \$ \$

The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrate, as equally useful

Edward Gibbon

\$ \$ \$

Opposing one species of superstition with another, set them a-quarreling; while we ourselves, during their fury and contention, happily make our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy.

David Hume

BEING GOOD WITHOUT THE GODS

[POSNER] supposes, in effect, that if God is dead, then everything is indeed permitted; that when religion goes out the door, morality goes out the door, too; that all we have left, if we deny ourselves the appeal to transcendent sources of authority in moral matters, is a situation in which the world is a great market and individuals are simply competing to maximize the satisfaction of their subjective preferences, any one of which is as good as any other. If not heavenly judgment, then hands off on all moral judgment...He makes the mistake of thinking that humans cannot invent and commit themselves to moral categories on their very own hook, without the other world to tell them so.

This is the sort of error that will be made by someone all too fascinated by religion, and by human dependence on it; by someone who doesn't altogether trust human beings to use their very own wits to say what has value and how much.

Martha Nussbaum

\$ \$ \$

Some men have managed to be honorable, noble, virtuous without acknowledging a personal God or revelation. The natural law and the natural virtues can get you pretty far... But the good kind of paganism has always stipulated that the natural virtues require positive cultivation. The modern superstition about the natural goodness of the id is a pernicious substitute.

Wm. F. Buckley, Jr.

ON LIMITS

No matter what age you are or what endeavor you're involved in, life is an opportunity, and it's only limited by your imagination. What you want to do and what you can achieve are only limited by what you can dream about...If you can conceive it, it's possible.

Dick Rutan, Voyager pilot

\$ \$ \$

Realizing that there are important things that are in fact impossible and that can be known to be impossible could bring to a screeching halt much of the vacuous political and economic rhetoric spouted by various ideologues of the left, center, and right.

Campbell and Higgins

\$ \$ \$

If there is a single notion common to all realists, it would be that there exists a real physical world that constrains what we can do, and that those constraints enable us to get some unequivocally reliable information about how the real world really works.

Henry Bauer

\$ \$ \$

I hope I'm right in believing that the idea of limits is due for a revival.

Christopher Lasch

MORE ON LIMITS

For evil belongs to the class of the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to that of the limited.

Aristotle

\$ \$ \$

He who introduces the word "infinity" or any of its derivations ("forever" or "never," for instance) is also trying to escape discussion.

Garrett Hardin

\$ \$ \$

Natural desires are limited, but those which spring from false opinions can have no stopping point. The false has no limits.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

Unwise are those who aspire,
Who outrange the limits of man.
Briefly, we live. Briefly
then die. Wherefore, I say,
he who hunts a glory, he who tracks
some boundless, superhuman dream,
may lose his harvest here and now
and garner death. Such men are mad,
their counsels evil.

Euripides

CONTENTED WITH LITTLE

Contented wi' little and cantie wi' mair.
Contented with little and cheerful with more.

Robert Burns

\$ \$ \$

Non qui parum habet, sed qui plus cupit,
pauper est.

It is not the man who has too little, but the
man who craves more, that is poor.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

Multa petentibus desunt multa.

To those who seek for much, much is ever
lacking.

Horace

\$ \$ \$

For men gain contentment from moderation in
joy and a measured life... Thus you must set
your judgment on the possible and be sat-
isfied with what you have, giving little
thought to things that are envied and
admired, and not dwelling on them in your
mind...By no longer desiring more, you may
not suffer in your soul...For if you hold
fast to this judgment you will live in
greater contentment and will drive away those
not inconsiderable plagues of life, jealousy
and envy and ill will.

A man of sound judgment is not grieved by
what he does not possess but rejoices in what
he does possess.

Fortune is being content with moderate goods,
misfortune being discontent with many.

Democritus

\$ \$ \$

He has not as much money as I have. I have
all I want, and he has not.

John Muir

19-CENTURY PHILOSOPHER FORESEES A CROWDED WORLD

There is room in the world, no doubt, and even in old countries, for a great increase of population, supposing the arts of life to go on improving, and capital to increase. But even if innocuous, I confess I see very little reason for desiring it.

A population may be too crowded, though all be amply supplied with food and raiment. It is not good for man to be kept perforce at all times in the presence of his species. A world from which all solitude is extirpated, is a very poor ideal. Solitude, in the sense of being often alone, is essential to any depth of meditation or of character; and solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur, is the cradle of thoughts and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without.

Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature; with every rood of land brought into cultivation, which is capable of growing food for human beings; every flowery waste or natural pasture plowed up, all quadrupeds or birds which are not domesticated for man's use exterminated as his rivals for food, every hedgerow or superfluous tree rooted out, and scarcely a place left where a wild shrub or flower could grow without being eradicated as a weed in the name of improved agriculture.

If the earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness which it owes to things that the unlimited increase of wealth and population would extirpate from it, for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not a better or a happier population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, that they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to do it.

John Stuart Mill, 1848

**CHARACTER IN CHEKHOV PLAY
FORESEES 20TH-CENTURY ECOCIDE**

ASTROV: Well, I would consent to cutting wood when people really need it, but why destroy the forests? The Russian forests are literally groaning under the axe, millions of trees are being destroyed, the homes of animals and birds are being laid waste, the rivers are getting shallow and drying up, wonderful scenery is disappearing for ever...Anyone who can burn up all that beauty in a stove, who can destroy something that we cannot create, must be a barbarian incapable of reason. Man is endowed with reason and creative power so that he can increase what has been given him, but up to the present he's been destroying and not creating. There are fewer and fewer forests, the rivers are drying up, the wild creatures are almost exterminated, the climate is being ruined, and the land is getting poorer and more hideous every day.

I can see your ironic expression, and I believe that what I say doesn't seem at all serious to you... and maybe it is just crankiness...All the same when I go walking by the woods... I saved from being cut down, or when I hear the rustling of the young trees I planted with my own hands, I'm conscious of the fact that the climate is to some extent in my power too, and that if mankind is happy in a thousand years' time, I'll be responsible for it even though only to a very minute extent. When I plant a little birch tree and then see it growing green and swaying in the wind, my heart fills with pride and I...[Sees the workman who has brought a glass of vodka on a tray.] However... [Drinks.] It's time for me to go. After all, that's probably just my crankiness. Permit me to take my leave. [Goes towards the house.]

Anton Chekhov, 1900

TWO PARADOXES

The Gestapo and the Savior

[During the Nazi era in Germany, the great physicist Max Planck used to deliver sermons in church. Gestapo spies were placed in the congregation to make sure that his sermons were politically correct. Ed.]

Planck's lessons on religion, which made no reference to Christ, did not please that religious body the Gestapo, which insisted on hard-selling the Savior in its model sermon for delivery in occupied territory. "Neutrality toward Christ is a dangerous, even an impossible thing."

J.L. Heilbron

\$ \$ \$

Did Aristotle Advocate "Situational Ethics"?

But up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate before he becomes blameworthy is not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception.

Aristotle

ON NOT TALKING TOO MUCH

Have more than thou showest,
Speak less than thou knowest.

The Fool, in King Lear

\$ \$ \$

But nothing will help quite so much as just
keeping quiet, talking with other people as
little as possible, with yourself as much as
possible.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

Wovon man nicht sprechen kann darüber muss
man schweigen.

Whereof one cannot speak, one must be silent.

Wittgenstein

\$ \$ \$

A tongue without reins,
defiance, unwisdom -
their end is disaster.
But the life of quiet good,
the wisdom that accepts -
these abide unshaken,
preserving, sustaining
the houses of men.

Euripides

\$ \$ \$

O si tacuisses, philosophus mansisses.
If only I had kept my mouth shut, I would
still be a philosopher.

Latin saying

ON NOT BEING TOO SERIOUS

Do not be eager to know everything lest you
become ignorant of everything.

Democritus

\$ \$ \$

It is not wisdom to be only wise.

George Santayana

\$ \$ \$

There are some things so serious that you can
only joke about them.

Neils Bohr

\$ \$ \$

Submit to Fate without unseemly wrangle:
Such complications frequently occur -
Life is one closely complicated tangle:
Death is the only true unraveller!

Try we life-long, we can never
Straighten out life's tangled skein,
Why should we, in vain endeavor,
Guess and guess and guess again?
Life's a pudding full of plums,
Care's a canker that benumbs.
Wherefore waste our elocution
On impossible solution?
Life's a pleasant institution,
Let us take it as it comes!

Set aside the dull enigma,
We shall guess it all too soon;
Failure brings no kind of stigma -
Dance we to another tune!
String the lyre and fill the cup,
lest on sorrow we should sup.
Hop and skip to Fancy's fiddle,
Hands across and down the middle -
Life's perhaps the only riddle
That we shrink from giving up!

W.S. Gilbert

IN PRAISE OF FOLLY

The fool doth think that he is wise, but the
wise man knows himself to be a fool.

As You Like It

\$ \$ \$

The first principle is that you must not fool
yourself - and you are the easiest person to
fool.

Richard Feynman

\$ \$ \$

Misce stultitiam consilis brevem;
Dulce est desipere in loco.
Mingle brief folly with thy wisdom;
'Tis sweet at the fitting time to play the
fool.

Horace

\$ \$ \$

At times discretion should be thrown aside,
and with the foolish we should play the fool.

Menander

\$ \$ \$

Aliquando et insanire iucundum est.
It is sometimes pleasant even to act like a
madman.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

A little folly is desirable in him that will
not be guilty of stupidity.

Montaigne

\$ \$ \$

Intermingle jest with earnest.

Francis Bacon

\$ \$ \$

Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee,
Jest and youthful jollity;
Quips and cranks and wanton wiles,
Nods and becks and wreathed smiles,
Sport that wrinkled care derides,
And laughter holding both his sides.

John Milton

FOLLY GOES OFF THE WALL:

What fools these mortals be.

Puck, in a Midsummer Night's Dream

\$ \$ \$

[As usual, someone else said it first.]

Et tanta stultitiam mortalium est.

What fools these mortals be.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

This view is even more pessimistic than the one held by Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor who said: mankind is frail, needs bread, cannot bear freedom but requires miracle, mystery, and authority.

Saul Bellow

\$ \$ \$

India: Wearing garlands of flowers, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi joined loincloth-clad priests chanting ancient Sanskrit around smoking firepits yesterday in a 5,000-year-old ritual imploring the Hindu god of fire to end India's worst drought in a decade.

News item

\$ \$ \$

HOROSCOPES COME TO UNPREDICTABLE END

The stars have gone out at Pinelands Regional High School in Little Egg Harbor Township, N.J. School officials have decided to end the reading of horoscopes over the public-address system during student council announcements.

Superintendent Clement Crea said he did not want to halt the horoscopes, but did so last week on the advice of the School Board lawyer after six people called the school to complain.

News item

BARNUM'S LAW

There's a sucker born every minute.

P.T. Barnum

\$ \$ \$

As a part-time resident of Washington state, where she now does her writing, MacLaine provides the explanation for the Northwest's reputation as the epicenter of this spiritual ferment: the trees, all of the trees. The trees are all full of silica, a sort of crystal, and crystals are amplifiers, increasing the energy around them, she says. For the Higher Self seminar, she says she charges "\$100 for the mind, \$100 for the body, \$100 for the spirit."

News item

\$ \$ \$

From Diognetus: to avoid frivolous enthusiasms; to distrust what miracle-mongers and magicians say about charms, exorcising spirits, and the like.

Marcus Aurelius

\$ \$ \$

At its nuttiest extreme are those with holistics in their heads, those whose reaction to reductionism takes the form of a belief in psychic energies, life forces that cannot be described in terms of the ordinary laws of inanimate nature. I would not try to answer these critics with a pep talk about the beauties of modern science. The reductionist world-view is chilling and impersonal. It has to be accepted as it is, not because we like it, but because that is the way the world works.

Steven Weinberg

\$ \$ \$

Libenter homines id quod volunt credunt.

Men willingly believe that which they wish to believe.

Julius Caesar

BARNUM'S LAW: FURTHER EVIDENCE

AILING TRY ALTERNATE CURES

BOSTON -- A third of all Americans seek relief from aches and pains outside mainstream medicine, spending \$14 billion a year on such therapies as relaxation techniques and herbal cures, a survey suggests. The researchers estimate that Americans actually pay more visits to providers of these unorthodox treatments than they do to primary care physicians.

The most common of these therapies are, in order, relaxation techniques, chiropractic, massage, imagery, spiritual healing, commercial weight-loss programs, macrobiotics and other lifestyle diets, herbal medicine, megavitamins, self-help groups, energy healing, biofeedback, hypnosis, homeopathy, acupuncture, and folk remedies.

Newspaper item

\$ \$ \$

Oh le gran belle cose che a intendere si danno a quei che poco sanno per natura!

Oh the great and wonderful things that the stupid by nature can be made to believe!

Joseph Haydn, from Il Mondo della Luna

\$ \$ \$

Forty-nine percent of Americans believe people are sometimes possessed by the devil. Two-thirds of Americans believe the devil exists.

Gallup poll, 1990

\$ \$ \$

"He [Satan] is real and he is constantly at work in the world," the evangelist Billy Graham wrote recently. "I frankly don't see how you can explain all the evil in the world - from wars to tragic famines - apart from the evil action of Satan." News item

FUNDAMENTALISM

A Questionnaire on Creation

1. The stars are all the same age, formed a few thousand years when the universe was just four days old. T F
2. The sun, moon, and stars were all created on the same day. T F
3. Contrary to the time scale presented in standard dictionaries and encyclopedias, the earth is actually less than 10,000 years old. T F
4. In the distant past, human beings and dinosaurs were alive on earth at the same time. T F
5. Grass and trees were growing on earth before the sun, moon, and stars were created. T F
6. All forms of animal life were created within a period of just two days. T F
7. Within two generations after they appeared on earth, human beings had learned to herd sheep and till the soil. T F
8. Two members of each animal species were at one time confined aboard a huge boat. T F
9. Before the first man committed the first sin, there was no death and no animals ate flesh. T F
10. The book of Genesis, taken literally, provides an accurate account of the origin of the solar system and life on earth. T F

[All of the above were designated as "true" by a Baptist minister and a spokesman for a Community Evangelical Fellowship.]

FUNDAMENTALISM, CONTINUED

Fundamentalism likewise tends to adopt very narrow points of view. It accepts the literal reality of an ancient, out-of-date cosmology simply because it is found expressed in the Bible; this blocks any dialogue with a broader way of seeing the the relationship between culture and faith. Its relying upon a non-critical reading of certain texts of the Bible serves to reinforce political ideas and social attitudes that are marked by prejudices - racism, for example - quite contrary to the Christian Gospel.

The fundamentalist approach is dangerous, for it is attractive to people who look to the Bible for ready answers to the problems of life. It can deceive these people, offering them interpretations that are pious but illusory, instead of telling them that the Bible does not necessarily contain an immediate answer to each and every problem. Without saying as much in so many words, fundamentalism actually invites people to a kind of intellectual suicide. It injects into life a false certitude, for it unwittingly confuses the divine substance of the biblical message with what are in fact its human limitations.

The Interpretation of the Bible
in the Church, by the
Pontifical Biblical Commission

§ § §

Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurence of the improbable.

H.L. Mencken

POSTMODERN MALAISE: THE DENIAL OF TRUTH

Postmodernists are attacking the Enlightenment project on which the natural and social sciences are based. They hold that there is no truth outside of ideology and, indeed, they suggest that the search for truth is itself the central Western illusion. Truth, they believe, is invented, not discovered...The idea that the historian masters facts and recovers past reality is, in...the postmodernist point of view, "simply a figment of the Western, capitalist imagination." As one postmodernist has put it, "history is the Western myth."

Gordon S. Wood

\$ \$ \$

The situation of leftist thought is symptomatic of the muddle of contemporary academic criticism generally...Theoretically, most academic critics are committed to the view that meaning is unstable, that "the natural" and "the real" are culturally constructed, that the validity of interpretations is measured by their persuasiveness rather than by their proximity to "truth." ...Everything must submit to the interrogation of theories that are relentless in their subversion of certainty.

Louis Menand

\$ \$ \$

[According to some writers] there can be no "objective" validation, and each society makes up its own world. Our own civilization, however, is based on the belief in an independent objective truth.

Ernest Gellner

\$ \$ \$

By arguing that truth is unknowable and all utterances are suspect, the post-structuralists have doomed their own language to nullity.

David Denby

True wisdom is to keep the heart and soul aloof from over-subtle wits.

Euripides

THE MIRACLE OF MATHEMATICS

It is a mystery to me that the concepts of mathematics (things like the real and complex numbers, the calculus and group theory), which are purely inventions of the human imagination, turn out to be essential for the description of the real world of natural phenomena. But so it is.

Sheldon Glashow

\$ \$ \$

We may now claim to understand the precession of gyroscopes, and indeed we do, mathematically. However, this is a mathematical thing, which, in a sense, appears as a "miracle." It will turn out, as we go to more and more advanced physics, that many simple things can be deduced mathematically more rapidly than they can be really understood in a fundamental or simple sense. This is a strange characteristic, and as we get into more and more advanced work there are circumstances in which mathematics will produce results which no one has really been able to understand in any direct fashion.

Richard Feynman

\$ \$ \$

The first point is that the enormous usefulness of mathematics in the natural sciences is something bordering on the mysterious and that there is no rational explanation for it. ...The miracle of the appropriateness of the language of mathematics for the formulation of the laws of physics is a wonderful gift which we neither understand nor deserve.

Eugene Wigner

\$ \$ \$

Why is mathematics useful for anything? Why is it that purely logical deductions from seemingly barren axioms lead to so many magnificent results with such worldly application? The answer, I think, is very clear. It's a miracle.

Harry Garland

ANOTHER KIND OF MIRACLE

No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which endeavors to establish.

David Hume

\$ \$ \$

As a methodology of research, science adopts as its cardinal postulate - proved fruitful by its enormous success since the time of Galileo, Newton, and Descartes - the commitment to explain empirical phenomena by reference to invariant laws of nature and to avoid appeals to the miraculous, defined as suspension of those laws, for particular events.

Stephen Jay Gould

\$ \$ \$

St. Augustine took no account of supernatural causes. A miracle is simply an unusual event occurring in the course of nature, the immediate cause of which is unknown. It is done "non contra naturam sed contra quam est nota naturam."

Encyclopedia Britannica

\$ \$ \$

[New Age enthusiasts like to mention quantum theory and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, as if these gave support to their flaky notions. Ed.]

Because quantum mechanics predicts only probabilities, it has gained a reputation in some circles of permitting just about anything. Is it true that in quantum mechanics anything goes? That depends on whether events of very, very low probability are included... one preceded by 62 zeros... There is no practical difference between that kind of probability and zero. Anything that improbable is effectively impossible.

Murray Gell-Mann

PROBABLY NO ONE IS SURE

There are terrible difficulties in the notion of probability, but we may ignore them at present.

Bertrand Russell

\$ \$ \$

Yet that "probability" is, in the strict sense, indefinable, need not trouble us much; it is a characteristic which it shares with many of our most necessary and fundamental ideas.

J.M. Keynes

\$ \$ \$

Mathematicians live in a peaceful world where probability is defined as "a non-negative function with an integral equal to 1." That's it. That's the definition of probability. Mathematicians probe and poke at such functions to derive the laws of probability. Any connection to anything in the "real world" seems to be coincidental.

Harry Garland

\$ \$ \$

I find it very peculiar that nature is based on probabilistic laws...But for the life of me, I never understood exactly what probability is... It seems to me very peculiar that nature would have as its fundamental principle something statistical.

Leonard Susskind

\$ \$ \$

Does this mean that physics, a science of great exactitude, has been reduced to calculating only the probability of an event? Yes. That's a retreat, but that's the way it is: Nature permits us to calculate only probabilities.

Richard Feynman

\$ \$ \$

Feynman goes too far when he says that "Quantum mechanics permits us to calculate only probabilities."

Victor Weisskopf

ADVICE FROM ROME: SEIZE THE DAY

Carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero.
Seize the day, putting as little trust as may
be in the morrow.

Horace

\$ \$ \$

Hoc ante omnia fac, mi Lucili: disce gaudere,
Above all, my dear Lucilius, learn how to
feel joy.

Seneca.

\$ \$ \$

Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quaerere...
Cease to ask what the morrow will bring
forth, and set down as gain each day that
fortune grants.

Horace

\$ \$ \$

Crastinum si adiecerit deus,
laeti recipiamus.
If God has added another day, let's accept it
joyfully.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

AND FROM GERMANY

Lass nicht dein Herz ...
Let not thy heart,
which is God's kingdom upon earth,
become a desert.

J.S. Bach, Cantata BWV 80

\$ \$ \$

AND FROM BRITAIN

Never to allow gradually
the traffic to smother
With noise and fog, the flowering
of the spirit.

Stephen Spender

THE JOY OF NATURE

For a life spent viewing all the variety, the majesty, the sublimity of things around us can never succumb to boredom; the feeling that one is tired of being, of existing, is usually the result of an idle and inactive leisure. Truth will never pall on someone who explores the world of nature; it will be the untruths that are cloying.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

Many people go through life as though they are wearing blinders or are sleepwalking. Their eyes are open, yet they may see nothing of their wild associates on this planet. Their ears, attuned to motor cars and traffic, seldom catch the music of nature - the singing of birds, frogs, or crickets - or the wind. These people are biologically illiterate - environmentally illiterate - and yet they may fancy themselves well informed, perhaps sophisticated. They may know business trends or politics, yet haven't the faintest idea of what makes the natural world tick.

Roger Tory Peterson

\$ \$ \$

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

Wordsworth

THE JOY OF MUSIC

The man that hath
no music in himself,
Nor is not moved
with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons,
stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit
are dull as night,
And his affections
dark as Erebus.
Let no such man be trusted.

The Merchant of Venice

\$ \$ \$

Mental elevation and spirituality is what classical music is all about. It is on a higher level than popular art. Nowadays you shouldn't say that because you're accused of being elitist. But that's the fact.

George Lloyd, composer

\$ \$ \$

Music has a remarkable capacity, in an abstract way, for mirroring an ideal equilibrium. That's why I'm particularly drawn to the great Classical composers. The sense of an ordered creation is inherent not only in music itself but also in the very nature of music-making. If you like, the most perfect expression of human behavior is a string quartet - where the four individual lines blend into a unity. Our world is a chaotic place, with potential for destruction as well as creation. I feel that there are positive, unifying forces, which can bring us a sense of wholeness, of well-being - which can counteract the forces of destruction. Music is one of those unifying forces.

Jeffrey Tate

MORE ON MUSIC

By means of music a man affirmed that the logically unanswerable was, in a different form, answerable. Sounds without determinate meaning became more and more pertinent, the greater the music.

Saul Bellow

\$ \$ \$

If you are looking for really profound mysteries, essential aspects of our existence for which neither the sciences nor the humanities can provide any sort of explanation, I suggest starting with music.

Author unknown

\$ \$ \$

We have a basic seriousness; music is not to be taken lightly.

Jeffrey Tate

\$ \$ \$

The Fifth Suite in, C Minor, is the big brother of the second. The music struggles with grandeur and resignation. This is more than sadness. It's the process you go through when you know you have to give up what's most precious; it's the courage, the will to accept what must be endured. Casals' performance of the saraband will always stay with me. It captured its simplicity, its complexity, and its depth all at once. It's astonishing how much Bach has conveyed here in just over a hundred notes.

Yo-Yo Ma

\$ \$ \$

Haydn is nearly always wonderful; in the late trios, the late quartets, and the late piano sonatas, his audacity, his ceaselessly inventive way with the themes and textures, his provision of harmonic and rhythmic surprises are at their most wonderful.

Andrew Porter

MUSIC AS A SPIRITUAL QUEST

For Beethoven and his musical heirs, music was not just a matter of style or tempo but something more vital. It was bound up with the experience of life itself. Music was not entertainment or mere technical display; it was part of a spiritual quest.

Art is an education of the soul, at once sensuous and moral. Its laws are those of reason, its powers those of divinity, its domain one's own mind. This is surely the vision of the composer of the Opus 111 Sonata, the man who could with rigorous concentration create variations on a theme that would end in suspension of all time and tension, as if the very idea of variation were being dissolved.

Edward Rothstein

\$ \$ \$

THE POET AS MYSTIC

And I have felt
a presence that disturbs
me with the joy
of elevated thoughts;
a sense sublime
of something far more
deeply interfused,
whose dwelling is the
light of setting suns,
and the round ocean
and the living air,
and the blue sky,
and in the mind of man;
a motion and a spirit
that impels
all thinking things,
all objects of all thought,
and rolls through
all things.

William Wordsworth

IN PRAISE OF THE GRAPE

Prince of the blessed,
the god of garlands and banquets,
Bacchus, Semele's son,
these blessings he gave:
laughter to the flute
and the loosing of cares
when the shining wine is spilled
at the feast of the gods,
and the wine-bowl casts its sleep
on feasters crowned with ivy.

Euripides

\$ \$ \$

And wine that maketh glad the heart of man.

Psalm 104:15

\$ \$ \$

Nunc vino pellite curas.
Now banish care with wine.

Horace

\$ \$ \$

He that drinks is immortal
And can ne'er decay,
For wine still supplies
What age wears away.
How can he be dust
That moistens his clay?

Henry Purcell

\$ \$ \$

'Tis women makes us love,
'Tis love that makes us sad;
'Tis sadness makes us drink,
And drinking makes us mad!

Henry Purcell

\$ \$ \$

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and
whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Proverbs 20:1

THE TRANSIENCE OF LIFE

For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory
of man as the flower of grass. The grass
withereth and the flower thereof falleth
away.

I Peter i. 24

\$ \$ \$

ACH WIE FLÜCHTIG, ACH WIE NICHTIG

1. Chorus

Ah how brief, a thing of nothing
is the life of man;
like a cloud we come to being
and as quickly then we perish -
thus is our life, behold!

2. Aria (tenor)

Quickly as the swift stream flowing
so our days of life haste by.
Time drops away, the hours are swift -
thus suddenly the drops divide
when all descends to the abyss.

3. Recitativo (Alto)

All our joy is turned to sadness,
beauty like a flower fading,
all great strength to weakness turned;
fortune alters with time's passing,
soon all fame and honor's perished;
and man, his poetry and science,
is turned to dust within the grave.

J.S. Bach, Cantata BWV 26

\$ \$ \$

AUCH DAS SCHÖNE MUSS STERBEN

Even Beauty must die!
That which subdues men and gods
does not move
the steely heart of stygian Zeus...
Behold, the gods weep,
all the goddesses weep,
that beauty must fade,
that perfection must die.

Friedrich von Schiller

CONFRONTING DEATH

No one is so ignorant as not to know that some day he must die. Nevertheless, when death draws near he turns, wailing and trembling, looking for a way out. Wouldn't you think a man a prize fool if he burst into tears because he was not alive a thousand years ago? A man is as much a fool for crying because he will not be alive a thousand years from now. There's no difference between the one and the other - you didn't exist and you won't exist - you've no concern with either period.

Seneca

\$ \$ \$

Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I have yet heard,
It seems to me most strange
that man should fear,
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come.

Julius Caesar

\$ \$ \$

Stultum est timere quod vitare non potes.

It is foolish to fear that which you cannot avoid.

Publilius Syrus

\$ \$ \$

Each of us must live with the private consciousness of his or her own weakness and inner contradictions, with the inexorable limits of physical frailty, aging, and mortality.

Robert Alter

FROM THE HYMN OF EMPEDOCLES

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoyed the sun,
To have lived light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;
To have advanced true friends, and beat down
 baffling foes;

That we must feign a bliss
of doubtful future date,
And while we dream on this
Lose all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant
 our repose?

Not much, I know, you prize
What pleasures may be had,
Who look on life with eyes
Estranged, like mine, and sad:
And yet the village churl feels the truth
 more than you;

Who's loth to leave this life
Which to him little yields:
His hard-tasked sunburnt wife,
His often-labored fields;
The boors with whom he talked,
 the country spots he knew.

But thou, because thou hear'st
Men scoff at Heaven and Fate;
Because the gods thou fear'st
Fail to make blest thy state.
Tremblest, and will not dare to trust
 the joys there are.

I say, fear not! life still
Leaves human effort scope,
But, since life teems with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope.
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st
 not then despair.

Matthew Arnold

AND GLADLY WOLDE HE LERNE, AND GLADLY TECHE.

Chaucer

I am glad to learn in order that I may teach. Nothing will ever please me, no matter how excellent or beneficial, if I must retain the knowledge of it to myself. And if wisdom were given me under the express condition that it must be kept hidden and not uttered, I should refuse it. No good thing is pleasant to possess without friends to share it,

However, the truth will never be discovered if we rest content with discoveries already made. Besides, he who follows another not only discovers nothing, but is not even investigating. What then? Shall I not follow in the footsteps of my predecessors? I shall indeed use the old road, but if I find one that makes a shorter cut and is smoother to travel, I shall open the new road. Men who have made these discoveries before us are not our masters, but our guides. Truth lies open for all; it has not yet been monopolized. And there is plenty of it left for future generations to discover. Farewell.

Seneca

